

How "Nina"⁶⁶ Came to America⁹⁹

The Moving Story Behind Elisa® USA



Here is the sculpture that inspired Angela Smith to bring Elisa products to the United States. "Nina," from the Montserrat Ribes Collection: Teenagers, measures 5.75" and retails for \$292.00. The included quote states, "She wears two watches, as if to spite the ticking of time. She knows dreaming is not about rushing."

This is a story that reinforces the passion for what a business's services can do for a consumer, beyond just the product.

The story begins with internationally renowned Spanish sculptor Montserrat Ribes. As a child, Ribes and her family often traveled to the Spanish coastline. There, she found endless pleasure scooping buckets of sand from the beach and transforming them into magical, sculpted sand castles.

Blessed at a young age with a sharp, inquisitive mind and a natural talent for comprehending others' emotions, Ribes began a tradition that continues to this day. She is never without a notebook that serves as a sketchbook and

diary where she can record what she observes, whether it is the tender embrace of a father cradling his young child, or the way a young woman gracefully drapes a scarf across her shoulder.

Ribes studied Applied Arts at Barcelona's Saint Jordi School of Fine Arts, specializing in the areas of ceramics, engraving, printing, restoration, and interior decorating. Four years after winning the 1975 Biennial Art Exhibition in Seville, she opened her own school, which she operated until 1998.

In the early 1980s, a mutual friend introduced Ribes to Alberto Roca, president and owner of Elisa, a Spanish maker

of fine, handmade ceramic dolls. Recognizing their shared love of art and sculpting, Ribes agreed to sculpt some designs for Elisa. After they were created, Roca liked them so much that he asked Ribes to continue creating pieces for Elisa, which caused a dramatic shift in focus for the company. To this day, Ribes' creations remain the most important part of the Elisa company.

It is no wonder that collectors are drawn to Ribes' sculptures, just as Roca was. Influenced by real life moments, Ribes recreates the human form in its never-ending range of moods and motions, drawing inspiration from her innate ability to be a keen observer of human nature. With a sense that is more highly attuned than others, she sculpts all the subtle emotions that the body can express — the tilt of a chin, the touch of a hand, or a tremulous smile — creating pieces of art from a simple mound of clay.

Initially, Ribes' exquisite and expressive original sculptures were reproduced using the firm's 30-year-old ceramic techniques. However, the contracting that occurs during the firing and drying of ceramic material altered the realism and feel of Ribes' designs, changing their very essence.

After intensive experimentation to correct this problem, Elisa developed an exclusive, proprietary marble and ceramic compound that faithfully reproduced Ribes' creations while maintaining excellent technical characteristics. Using marble mined from a nearby range of Spanish mountains, the marble and ceramic mix is ground into a powder, which is then transformed into a paste by adding a hardening resin. This paste is poured into molds that have been created from Ribes' original piece and are cold fired to create a series of 40 to 50 limited-edition reproductions. The actual "skin" on each figure is not painted; it has an astonishingly life-like appearance that results from the unique mix of marble, ceramic, and resin. Pieces can weigh as much as 20 pounds and are highly durable.

After the figures are cold cast, employees called "finishers" complete three stages of cleaning and detailed sculpting. Then, trained artists who are graduates of The Montserrat Ribes Daviu School in Sabadell (1979-1998) use the basic colors, prepared by Ribes, to complete a three-step painting process quite similar to that used in oil painting. Mixing the colors on their palettes to obtain a wide range of shades, the artisans apply the colors in different layers until the desired effect is achieved. Because each completed figure reflects the personality of the artist who painted it, the same artist puts the finishing touches on all pieces in a series to ensure uniformity in style.

Using her slender fingers and the simple wooden tools and paintbrushes that sculptors have used for centuries, Ribes freezes moments in time with sculptures that express her creative soul, love of family, and appreciation for beauty. Each sculpture comes with a corresponding quote that captures the spirit of that particular piece, as it speaks to experiences of an individual's past or to dreams of the future.

Today, Ribes creates her renowned sculptures in a small, home-based studio in the town of Castellar del Valles, near Barcelona (where she is also known for her religious crèche

sculptures of the Holy Family and abstract-style bronzes). She imbues each piece with a perfect harmony of color, shape, and detail. The results are true pieces of art that speak to people. "It often surprises me that men even comment on the realism and beauty of my work," Ribes says.

The Naming of "Nina"

One of Ribes' pieces spoke very strongly to a woman named Angela Smith. It was a chance encounter with this figurine that began Smith's connection with Ribes. The figurine reminded her of her daughter Nina, and after many months of trying to research information about the figurine, she later learned that, by fate, the figurine's title was also "Nina." Just as soon as the chills began to travel up her spine, she knew that there was something here to discover.

Because of the difficulties Smith experienced while trying to track down the figurine, she began researching opportunities to have the line distributed in the U.S. and traveled to Spain to meet Ribes. When Smith was finally able to speak with Ribes, she asked her why she decided to name the figurine "Nina," an unusual, non-Spanish name for a piece created by a Spanish artist. Ribes paused as she responded with widened eyes, looking as though she had just learned the answer to something that had puzzled her for months.

Ribes informed Angela that this sculpture was the *only* piece she had ever had difficulty naming. Normally, the names would come to her as she sculpted the pieces. With this particular piece, it wasn't until Ribes awoke in the middle of the night that the name "Nina" came to her. Ribes told Angela, "Now I know why. It was to bring you to me — and my sculptures to the United States." Soon after, Angela Smith became a distributor of Elisa products for Elisa USA.

The story behind Elisa USA is a powerful testimony to the impact that a company's product can have on one's life. A product can be so more than just a physical object — it can also be a reminder of a special moment or a snapshot of a powerful emotion.

Of course, the Elisa company knew that all along.

About Montserrat Ribes:

Montserrat Ribes' sculptures are on permanent display in the Vatican's Pressepio Museum and have been exhibited in art galleries in Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, and Rome. Her sculptures can also be found in Spain's national museums and in squares and parks across the country. Ribes and her husband, a photographer, have a daughter, son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter. When she is not busy sculpting, Ribes enjoys spending time with her family.

About Elisa USA and the Montserrat Ribes Collection:

Inspired by real life moments, the Montserrat Ribes Collection offers individually signed and numbered, limited edition masterpieces. The sculptures perfectly balance the harmony of color and form and enhance any décor with warmth, calm and artistic beauty. They are available in select art galleries, high-end design studios, and museum stores.

For more information about Elisa USA, visit their website (www.elisausa.com) or call 866-90-ELISA. 